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SUBJECT: CODEL GRAHAM SHARES VIEWS WITH GOK ON IRANIAN NUCLEAR THREAT, UNITARY IRAQ, PAKISTAN ANARCHY, AND GAZA

Classified By: Ambassador Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶11. (C) Summary: In a January 8 meeting, Senator Joe Biden, accompanied by Senator Lindsey Graham, briefed Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Jaber Al Sabah and Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al Sabah on the U.S. political transition and cabinet formation process. In a wide-ranging conversation on regional topics, the Kuwaitis urged the incoming Obama administration to work with Russia to build an international coalition capable of dissuading Iran from the nuclear weapons option, sought enhanced engagement with Pakistan to combat terrorism, and discussed the future of Iraq. The PM expressed Kuwaiti anguish over the "genocide" in Gaza. Senator Biden emphasized that he was traveling to the region in his capacity as the outgoing chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and that he and President-elect Obama had made it clear there is only one President at a time and that he was here to listen. Biden noted the difficulties of dealing with an Iran that has rejected all efforts to bring its nuclear program within IAEA safeguards, commented on the desirability of improved relations with Russia, and queried the Kuwaitis on their views of the situation in Pakistan, India, and Iraq. End Summary.

¶12. (C) During a January 8 overnight stay in Kuwait, Senator Joe Biden (D-Delaware), accompanied by Senator Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) met with Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Jaber Al Sabah at Shwaykh Palace, the PM's residence. Participants included:

United States

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The Ambassador  
Senator Joseph Biden  
Senator Lindsey Graham  
DCM Alan Misenheimer  
Political Counselor (notetaker)

Kuwait

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Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al Sabah  
Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al Sabah  
Deputy Minister for Diwan Affairs Shaykh Ali Al-Jarrah Al  
Sabah  
Notetakers

Incoming U.S. Cabinet to be "Centrist" and "Coherent"

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¶13. (C) Senator Biden briefed the Prime Minister on the efforts of the incoming administration of President-elect Obama to appoint a Cabinet that holds the confidence of all Americans. While acknowledging that the incoming administration is now in a "honeymoon" phase, Biden stressed that he is optimistic that a real measure of rapprochement

between Democrats and Republicans can be achieved as the new administration faces the present array of global challenges.

#### Concerns Over Iranian Intransigence

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¶4. (C) A wide-ranging foreign policy review touched first on Iran. The PM pointed out that the Bushehr nuclear reactor is less than 100 miles from Kuwait. Observing that Iranian intransigence has left few options, Biden queried the PM on his views. The PM acknowledged that the GOK is deeply concerned about Iran's perceived determination to build a nuclear weapon -- an outcome that it believes could occur within two years -- but does not see a clear path to turning Iran away from its nuclear ambitions. He noted, however, that the GOK rejects the option of a military attack on Iran or its nuclear facilities as a non-starter and views negotiations as the sole viable option. One possibility, he suggested, would be for the USG and other powers to work with Russia, which has considerable influence over Iran's nuclear program, to provide fissile material for nuclear power, while steering the Iranians away from the nuclear weapons option. Biden, in response, noted that the USG had been receptive to just such an approach, but the Iranians had rejected it.

¶5. (C) Picking up the thread of the conversation, FM Dr. Mohammad noted that Kuwait and the other GCC states had recently concluded at the GCC Summit in Muscat that, given Iran's hegemonic behavior and its "belligerence" towards GCC interests in Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, Yemen and the Gulf, the GCC was "not ready" to have multilateral relations with Iran. Individual GCC states will continue to conduct bilateral

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relations with Iran, but there appeared to be little scope for these states to directly impact Iran's nuclear program. The FM acknowledged that the GOK is "perplexed" over how to deal with Iran on the nuclear issue and also surprised by the complaisance of the international community. Acquisition by Iran of a nuclear weapon, he noted, should be a concern of the international community -- and particularly of Russia, Iran's neighbor -- and not just the USG and the GCC. With this in mind, the FM urged the USG to work with Russia to build an international coalition that could effectively pressure Iran, noting that the effectiveness of existing sanctions had run its course.

#### Examining the Russia Option

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¶6. (C) Biden agreed with the importance of bringing Russia into the equation. He noted, however, that over the past several years there has been an erosion in the U.S. ability to lead a coalition, and it will take time to rebuild our capacity to lead.

¶7. (C) Senator Graham commented that he agreed with Biden and the GOK interlocutors that it would be helpful to have the Russians fully engaged in an effort to dissuade Iran from pursuing the nuclear weapons option, but wondered about the probable regional response if the effort failed. Would Saudi Arabia or the other GCC states attempt to acquire a nuclear weapons capability of their own? Throwing up his hands, the PM responded that Kuwait and the other GCC states had no option but to "insist on peaceful talks." None of the GCC states would attempt to acquire a nuclear weapon; they would "leave this burden on our allies."

#### India and Pakistan

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¶8. (C) Biden said the purpose of his present visit was to assess the "baseline" of what directions our friends in the region believe the USG under an Obama administration should pursue, especially with regard to Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Iraq. Responding on this issue, FM Dr. Mohammad

said that in the wake of the recent Mumbai terrorist attack -- and given the large number of Pakistani expatriate workers in Kuwait -- the GOK had determined that it needed to enhance its cooperation with Pakistani security services to combat terrorism. The GOK, he said, believes the global community -- including India -- needs to engage the present Pakistani government, not isolate it.

¶19. (C) Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al-Sabah, however, expressed a gloomier view of Pakistan, characterizing the country as an anarchic state with a weak president who exercises little control outside the capital, and whose tribal groups are involved in weapons trading. The PM also asserted that Benazir Bhutto had flagged for U.S. and Saudi leaders some thirteen years earlier the interest of Iranian President Rafsanjani in acquiring the services of AQ Khan but that her warnings had apparently gone unheeded in Washington.

#### Anguish Over "Genocide" In Gaza

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¶10. (C) The PM raised an issue that has been at the forefront of the GOK's recent agenda, noting Kuwaiti horror over the "genocide" it perceives is being perpetrated in Gaza, a situation which he said the "whole Islamic world opposes" and which he characterized as a "Rwanda for the Middle East." Senator Biden, responding, noted that USG practice is for only one administration at a time to comment on such matters.

#### All Aboard for A Unified Iraq

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¶11. (C) Senator Graham commended the GOK for its decision to re-establish an embassy in Iraq and queried the PM about his assessment of Iraq's future. When the PM responded with a long-held GOK position that "we favor a unified Iraq," Biden assured him emphatically that no one in the incoming Obama administration supports the notion of a partitioned Iraq. Biden said the question remains how to achieve that outcome given strong differences of opinion between Arabs and Kurds and Sunni and Shia and the lack of a consensus among regional powers on what they will support in Iraq. Thanking his interlocutors for Kuwait's support for Operation Iraqi Freedom, Biden acknowledged that the "U.S. can only leave

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Iraq with Kuwaiti support. You are our ingress and our egress."

¶12. (U) CODEL staff cleared this cable.

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JONES